

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL RICHARD SIMCOCK, USMC,
REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM 6 TOPIC: OPERATIONS IN EASTERN AL ANBAR, OPERATION
ALLJAH, AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS MRAP VIA
TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 9:00 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2007

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COL. SIMCOCK: Good afternoon. Colonel Simcock.

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Colonel
Simcock, good afternoon to you. Good morning on our side. Thank you very much
for joining us today for the bloggers roundtable.

Colonel Simcock, commander of the Regimental Combat Team 6, and do you
have an opening statement, sir?

COL. SIMCOCK: No, not this time. I would just like to answer all your
questions. I think we can use our time in best to do that. So go ahead and
shoot. MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

Andrew Lubin, you were first on the line, so why don't you get us
started.

Q Colonel, Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cav ON Point. How are you this
afternoon, sir?

COL. SIMCOCK: Doing well. Good to talk with you.

Q Okay. Thanks. Colonel, if -- to try and split the hair between
the politics and the military and everything else that we're reading about these
days, if worse came to worse and the Marines in RCT 6 had to pull out, how would
the ISF deal with next 30 to 90 days? How are they spun up, and how would they
actually operate in the field, in your AO?

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, yeah, you know, that would be something -- it
would be a problem. Obviously, we watch the news over here obviously like you
are and what's going on with our national leadership and the chance of pulling
out a lot sooner. The key thing to keep in mind is, as the Marines do over
here, is we want to finish the mission that we've been given. We don't want to
pull out before it's done. We're having a lot of success. You talk about the
provincial security forces that we're working with over here, that continues to
increase, and we get more and more benefit out of their participation over here
in what we're doing.

So we really focus not only being pulled out too soon, but what we focus on is completing the mission that we have over here. And we're having a lot of success with that, and I can't overstate the importance of having the Iraqis working with us in the form of -- like you asked me -- about the provincial security forces.

Q Were they able -- are you pretty much providing overwatch, then, solely? Are they able to operate on their own? Are they getting that good?

COL. SIMCOCK: I classify the relationship that we have with them as a partnered relationship. They are never on their own, and we don't want them to be. They provide such a critical avenue for intelligence to us about what's going on on the ground that we are constantly engaged with them. In addition to that, with the relation -- the partnered relationship, we're constantly training with them, making them better, more capable force.

So I don't want to say that we're letting them out on their own; we don't want that. We want to stay engaged with them for what they give to us as a combat multiplier here in our AO.

Q Great. Thank you. MR. HOLT: Dave Dilegge with Small Wars Journal.

Q Good day, Colonel Simcock. Dave Dilegge here, Small Wars Journal. I just want to start off and say congrats on the RCT 6 accomplishments so far in Al Anbar. It seems like a very job well done in a difficult and complex environment.

I was looking at a Washington Times article this morning, and they were quoting unnamed U.S. military leaders saying the next step is integrate the local Sunni volunteer forces into the national Iraqi security forces. Could you elaborate on that, if and when it'll be done in Anbar, and some of the challenges you think is associated with that process?

COL. SIMCOCK: One of the things that we are seeing here in AO Raleigh is the addition of the Sunnis -- the local Sunni population into the Iraqi army. That is increasing with every class that goes through their military academy, their boot camp, if you will, here in Habbaniya.

So that is a huge step forward, you know, in reintegrating the Sunnis into the Iraqi security forces.

As I said, the last two classes have had a lot more Sunnis participating. We don't see a lot of problems in the Army between the Sunni and the Shi'a. They work as one. In fact, they will downplay, you know, the religious aspect of it and say -- you know, they won't identify themselves as Sunni or Shi'a, they'll identify themselves as Iraqi and are working for the betterment of Iraq. And I think that's a huge step forward for them.

Q Yeah, if I could just follow up on one quick thing here. If you were, say, commandant for the day or CINC for the day, what one or two capabilities that you may not have or need more of would top your list?

COL. SIMCOCK: That's an easy question. And the commandant was just out here a couple weeks ago and I told him exactly what I wish I had more of. Engineers and route clearance. Those are the two capabilities. It's a low-density, high-demand type capability that we just -- we need more of out here.

The engineers, they're working 24/7, literally. They're either building something or tearing something down, and that's something that I wish I had more of. They do a great job for us, but I'm just -- I just don't have enough of them.

Q Great. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Grim with Blackfive.

Q Good day, Colonel. This is Grim with Blackfive.net. Before I ask my question, my compliments to RCT 6, as a blogger, on what must be the finest unit blog any unit in the Marine Corps has. Your Sergeant Devore (sp) is doing a good job.

COL. SIMCOCK: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate that and I'll pass that on.

Q Please do.

The question I'd like to ask -- the last time we talked to you, you said that you were using a lot less air support, artillery and similar sorts of heavy weaponry; that a Marine rifle team was sufficient to the tasks you were encountering. Can you talk about whether that trend has continued, or changed in any way? COL. SIMCOCK: I would say that it has continued. We don't use the heavy fire support assets as much as when we first got here. The air aspect, the air combat element still plays a very huge role, you know, from aerial reconnaissance aspect. They do a lot to contribute to the mission. But I think what I told you last time was there's nothing out on the battlefield that a Marine rifle squad couldn't easily deal with. That is still true and probably more so.

And the main reason, again, for that is not really that, you know, my forces have changed. I've got the same forces here in RCT 6 that I've always had from a combat power standpoint. What has changed is the Iraqi equation to it. They continue to grow, Iraqi security forces, in the form of the Army, the Iraqi police, the provincial security forces, neighborhood watches. That has been the key element that has been able to allow me to do my mission and work with them so that we're both trying to accomplish the same thing.

Q Let me ask a very quick follow-up. We've been having some discussions about measures of effectiveness in Iraq. One of the things that several of us have thought might be important is this sort of heavy fire support and watching it, whether it tails off or gets more important as an MOE for how well the surge is working in various areas.

Do you think that's a useful measure or not?

COL. SIMCOCK: I definitely think it is. I mean, I have in my office -- on my bulkhead is a huge chart that I get briefed on once a month, and that's just what it does. It covers measures of effectiveness -- you know, the question of are we winning, or are we losing?

Now, I don't want to be asked -- I do not track, you know, supporting arms and the use thereof as a measure of effectiveness. However, it could easily be drawn in from just how we do use certain capabilities more or less to show that the situation on the ground is improving.

Things I do track, like IED attacks, how many casualties we take or we dole out -- we also use a lot of more positive measures of effectiveness. How many -- how governance is increasing, how economic situations in the various cities are also increasing.

But that is not to downplay -- you know, I think if you look and say, for example, how many artillery missions are fired on a weekly basis, I think you could see that you could -- you'd see a trend that that is in fact decreasing here in my area of operation.

Q Thank you, Colonel.

MR. HOLT: David Axe.

Q Hi, Colonel. It's David Axe with the Aviation Week Group. Let's talk MRAPs for a second, if you don't mind -- the new blast-resistant trucks.

COL. SIMCOCK: Sure.

Q So are you beginning to see -- I know you -- the Marines had these for EOD and route clearance for a while. Are you beginning to see them finally trickle down to the infantry?

COL. SIMCOCK: We are. And in fact, we've gotten 25 additional ones that we use for the infantry units that are out here. And they're a great vehicle. They're especially good being used out on the road networks. As you know, that's the chosen battlespace of our enemy. That's where they emplace the improvised explosive devices. And the MRAPs are truly superior, from a defensive nature, in protecting our Marines and soldiers. And I can't get enough of them. I'm supposed to get over 400 that are coming my way, and I will definitely employ every one of them that I get.

Q Have you found -- (off mike) -- to be an issue?

COL. SIMCOCK: I missed your last part of your question.

Q Have you found maintenance of these vehicles to be an issue?

COL. SIMCOCK: Yeah, that is going to be -- I don't know if I'd classify it as an issue, but it's something that we had to address. Our logistic support brigade that has -- that's in direct support of us, Combat Logistic Brigade Number 6 -- they have MRAP mechanics. They went to some classes before they deployed over here, in preparation for just that, being able to maintain the MRAPs.

It is going to be a shift for us, no doubt, from a parts standpoint, because we're now going to be working with different vehicles. We're still going to maintain our up-armored humvees, our 1114s. Those are still going to be the workhorses of our ground mobility. There's no doubt about that. But with different equipment, like this new vehicle, I mean, there will be some growing pains and some things we'll have to adjust accordingly. But we did see this coming, and we did take some preparatory actions before we came over here.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: And Bruce McQuain.

Q Thanks. Good afternoon, Colonel. Bruce McQuain, QandO.net. One of the more consistent complaints, I guess you'd say, we hear is the fact that while at local and provincial level governments are standing up and becoming responsive and being hooked up to the -- you know, local to provincial and that type thing, but what they're still not seeing are anything much from the central government hook-up.

Is that your experience as well?

COL. SIMCOCK: Bruce, I'll tell you, you're hitting the -- the long-term solution that's going to have to happen if we're going to have long-term success, you know, here in AO Raleigh. We are seeing limited support from the central government. It is happening, and I'll give you some examples of it.

Minister of Interior is providing money to pay, you know, the Iraqi police, the provisional security forces. In addition to that money, they're providing equipment to support those law enforcement and provisional security forces also, but we need more. And in a lot of different areas we need a lot more to come a lot faster, and that's the piece -- it is working, but it -- I tell you, it's not working fast enough, and it's not working in sufficient amounts.

Q If I can follow up, how do you feel or do you feel good about what you see, though, at a local and provincial level?

COL. SIMCOCK: To say that I feel good would be an understatement. I am continually amazed at how energetic and how much the local Iraqi government is actually doing to better their situation. They put in a great deal of work; they're working hand to hand not only with my Marines and soldiers on the ground, but they're also working with my embedded Provisional Reconstruction Teams that are out here. And they're truly the experts, you know, in the terms of reconstruction and governance, and they're working very, very close with them. And I'm very, very pleased with the efforts that local governance is putting forth.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, did someone else join us?

Q Yeah, it's Mike Goldfarb.

MR. HOLT: Hey, Mike. Okay.

Do you have a question for Colonel Simcock?

Q No, no, I'm fine. I'll just be listening in.

MR. HOLT: All right. I think we've gone through everybody, got a few minutes left here. Any follow-up questions? Q Yeah, I have one. Colonel, Andrew Lubin again. There are numbers coming out of Ramadi in the past couple of months, basically how few incidents there have been, a weekly or monthly basis. You had a drop in IED attacks, drop in fire fights, numbers of bullets fired and that type of thing. Can you give us those kind of numbers out of your AO, also? And if not --

COL. SIMCOCK: I don't have them in front of -- I don't have them right in front of me, but I will concur with that, you know, from an overarching

statement, and it goes back to who I was talking to earlier about measures of effectiveness.

IED attacks are down. Casualties are down. All measures of effectiveness that we track, all are going down in that regard; and the contrary is all the other measured -- positive measures of effectiveness that we track -- economic development, city governments standing up, numbers of police -- those type of statistics that we track, all up. I just don't -- I don't have it in front of me to give you any exact percentages or numbers. But from an overall trend, they are all good and continue to go that way.

Q Great. Thanks. Could we get Barry to send to us some time today, then?

COL. SIMCOCK: Yeah, I think -- yeah, we can definitely forward you some information on that.

Q Great. Thanks very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Anyone else? Any other follow-ups?

Q Yeah. Jack, Dave Dilegge again. Yeah, I'm interested a little bit in the intel structure. You know, as everyone knows (importing ?) intel is very important, especially on the human side, and then a lot of the capabilities that are normally designed at a higher level need to be pushed downward. And there's a lot of talk right now about formation or more formalizing company-level intel cells. I'd like to know if any structure exists in RCT 6.

Thanks.

COL. SIMCOCK: It does. We have intelligence cells that -- down to the company level, usually headed by an NCO. They receive training in a couple of ways. Some of it, the training will be conducted out of Twentynine Palms as our units go through Mojave Viper, the training exercise that we have out there. Other units will actually do it internally, where they'll tap into their intelligence sections, or S2s, to train up these NCOs to be prepared to deal with what they need to be over here.

The thing that I'd like to stress about that, though -- these aren't additional Marines that come with any type of specialized MOS training. These are Marines that reside within the rifle companies, often are just, you know, regular infantry Marines that volunteer to do this additional duty, receive some additional training, and we've found it to be very, very successful out here. And again, it is happening down at the company level.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anyone else?

Q I have one more question. This is Grim with blackfive.net. The last time we talked, Colonel, I asked you if there was anything we could send you; you asked for e-mails. Is there anything else you'd like?

COL. SIMCOCK: Let me just say one thing about the e-mails. The response on that was tremendous. It was -- it literally -- it overwhelmed our systems over here. Within about -- I think it was two weeks, we had like 30,000 e-mails that came to us in support, and I would just like to say, we actually

had to stop them because they were overwhelming our system, and we had to put them on a -- you know, refer them to our webpage. If you can, I would appreciate you doing anything to thank the people for all their support that they gave us. The Marines over here really do appreciate that; that's something sometimes that gets lost. They -- as I said, they watch the news over here, and a lot of times they seem to think that, you know, the people in the United States are not supporting what we're doing over here. Nothing, you know, based on the amount of replies we got back, could be further from the truth. It was obviously an overwhelming response, and I just thank you, because it came from your guys' follow-up on me asking that.

But as far as anything else, no. The Marines, soldiers, sailors over here are all doing very, very well, and again, I just want to thank you for the support that you all are giving us.

Q It's our pleasure.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Colonel Simcock, thank you very much for joining us today for the bloggers roundtable. Do you have any closing comments, thoughts to share with us?

COL. SIMCOCK: I don't. I just -- I hope that we can talk again, because, as I've told you last time we talked, I believe this is very, very important to our nation. I think that there are a lot of national interests, you know, at stake over here, and I think it's an important mission, and I just appreciate the time to talk with you and hopefully give you a little insight to what we're going through over here in AO Raleigh.

END.